
CHANGING MINDS

Final Evaluation Report

for Newport Mind

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Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care · University of South Wales

October 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the staff of Newport Mind for commissioning this study and providing direction throughout. As with any such project, this study was only possible thanks to the contributions of the participants – in this case the service users, volunteers, staff and their managers across Gwent – either as research participants or in helping to supply data to the research team. Their willing engagement with the study is gratefully acknowledged.

The report analyses the findings generated during the course of the study. The conclusions we come to are based on our understanding of the evidence presented to us at this point in time and any errors of interpretation are solely due to the authors.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Newport Mind commissioned the Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care (WIHSC) at the University of South Wales to undertake an independent evaluation of the Changing Minds service provided for young people aged 14-25 years in Gwent. The Changing Minds project is being run by Newport Mind and aims to improve the mental wellbeing of young people through peer to peer support, self-management courses and 1-to-1 support from a project worker. It is funded by a 5 year grant from the Big Lottery Fund and started in 2013.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to provide an independent and objective evaluation of Changing Minds, and was undertaken through a multi-methods approach using four key methods:

1. WIHSC analysed internal outcomes data collected by the Changing Minds project;
2. An online survey was designed and sent to past and present service users;
3. A discussion group was held with volunteers from the Changing Minds project;
4. Stakeholder interviews were conducted with staff from a range of organisations across Gwent including Families First, CAMHS, Primary Care Mental Health, Newport Police and social services;
5. Group and individual interviews were held with beneficiaries of the Changing Minds project

'WELLNESS WHEEL' OUTCOMES DATA

Changing Minds service users complete a 'Wellness Wheel' outcome measure before and after receiving an intervention. The Wellness Wheel was developed by Changing Minds in year 2 of the project to measure the projects impact on a young person's mental wellbeing. Key findings from the analysis were:

- Data from 325 beneficiaries was analysed, where Wellness Wheel data was available both before and after receiving an intervention from Changing Minds.
- All outcomes were significant ($p < 0.01$), with the vast majority of changes, where they occurred, being positive i.e. there were fewer cases where young people's scores decreased over time than cases where scores increased.

BENEFICIARY ONLINE SURVEY

81 young people responded to the Changing Minds survey. Key findings from the analysis were:

- 78% of respondents said they had say in the decision to get support from Changing Minds and 62% said that the support offered was right for them. 82% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt listened to at Changing Minds. Over half (59%) reported that they had learnt new skills to use in their everyday life. Changing Minds helped nearly half (47%) of respondents with a change in their life, such as in education, employment or at home. 38% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that Changing Minds helped them access other support.
- Many young people reported in a free-text comment that the service was friendly, accessible and non-judgemental and also commented on the benefits of group support with other young people.
- When asked to reflect on their experience with Changing Minds compared to other mental health services for young people, many reported a more timely and friendly service, whilst recognising that the support offered by Changing Minds might not be appropriate for everyone referred into the service.

- Suggestions for improvements to the Changing Minds service included having more sessions with the one-to-one support and self-management courses, shorter waiting times for some services and an increased presence in local schools.

DISCUSSIONS WITH VOLUNTEERS AND BENEFICIARIES

- The young people interviewed for this evaluation highly valued the support provided by Changing Minds.
- Staff were described as friendly, caring, non-judgemental, accessible and supportive. The young people felt that staff really got to know them as individuals and therefore they felt comfortable in sharing their experiences.
- The less formal, non-clinical environment of the Changing Minds service was favourably compared to the clinical setting of NHS and other mental health services.
- Although some young people were on waiting lists for a Changing Minds service, generally they were able to access support in a timely manner.
- The opportunities to connect with peers in a supportive group setting was highly beneficial to the young people who were interviewed. They reported feeling able to talk openly and make new friends. A strong online community also appeared to be forming via Facebook.
- The support from Changing Minds had made a big impact on the young people's confidence, emotions, behaviour, and their outlook on life.
- There were few suggestions for improvement which included publicising the service more widely (especially in schools), lowering the age that people are able to access the service, and making the courses of a longer duration.
- The volunteers felt highly valued by the service as they were given the opportunity to share their ideas about how the service is run and shape the content and format of the support offered.
- Volunteers described a range of benefits of the service for themselves personally, including building confidence, making new friends and a supportive peer network, and improving their CVs and applications to university.

INTERVIEWS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Key findings from the analysis of the interviews related to the impact of Changing Minds on young people supported by the service and the impact on the services that they provided within their organisations. The table (below) provides a summary of the key themes identified in the interviews along with some supporting quotes.

Theme	Quote
Few other services to support young people with mental health issues	<i>"It was the service that they offered that was the main thing because there wasn't much available for emotional wellbeing for teenagers, so that resource was very appealing."</i> [School Nurse]
Capacity in other mental health services	<i>"There is a high demand on our services and that's due to a lack of primary services that deal with children and young people's mental health... We're really grateful that there are things like Changing Minds out there because we believe that's where the</i>

	<i>children and young people's needs should be met, at least in the first instance."</i> [Community Team, Specialist CAMHS]
Referral process and communication	<i>"The fact that it's an online form and you just click send, it's so much easier than some of the other forms... It's nice to be just able to go online and fill in everything click send and that's done then."</i> [Families First]
Variety of support options for young people	<i>"They do a range of things – they do one-to-one, they do longer support than I can offer...so it's nice that they do a range of interventions."</i> [Specialist Practitioner Primary Care Mental Health]
Early intervention	<i>"They very much pick up the shades of grey where it's not quite a mental health illness or diagnosed issue and I think they prevent a lot of young people from snowballing down that road."</i> [Families First]
Support after discharge from other services	<i>"...if they felt that there was more help that was needed they were aware that there were these services and these courses, as opposed to going to their GP and getting referred onto a long waiting list"</i> [Recovery Worker, Primary Care Mental Health]
Accessible and engaging	<i>"I did have a child who was very anxious to the extreme and because it was a 1-2-1 service she did engage with that really well and then she engaged with me ...that was huge."</i> [Families First]
Providing appropriate non-clinical support	<i>"I think it's actually really, really helpful. At the moment young people are under a huge amount of additional pressures and I think having a safe place to talk and just talk about their worries and just talk about if they feel anxious or very stressed. A safe place to talk for young men and young women."</i> [Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychologist]

THREE KEY MESSAGES

Changing Minds has been successful in providing a support service for young people in Gwent with mental health issues. The need for the service has been demonstrated with many respondents suggesting that lower tier 'primary' support services such as Changing Minds is beneficial and appropriate for many young people experiencing difficulties with their mental wellbeing.

1. Changing Minds makes a difference to the young people who use the service

Through our evaluation we heard from young people who had used the Changing Minds service and from stakeholders who had referred young people into the service. The impact on young people included increased confidence, making new friends, being supported through a transition, learning skills and knowledge to cope with their emotions and daily life, and having somewhere to contact if they need support. Many young people who had used the service also went on to volunteer for

2. The need for Changing Minds services has been demonstrated in testimonies from young people and stakeholders

It was identified that there is a real need for less formal, non-clinical support services for young people. There is high demand for CAMHS and primary care mental health – much of which may be inappropriate and could be better managed in services such as Changing Minds. Many stakeholders views reflected the findings of the 2014 inquiry into CAMHS¹; they identified the need for support for young people who do not meet the ‘medical model’ criteria for CAMHS. Such appropriate support may prevent escalation of mental health problems by providing a ‘safe space’ for young people to talk and share their experiences. This may reduce pressure on existing mental health services and provide early support in a less costly setting.

3. Changing Minds offers unique, friendly and accessible mental health support for young people in Gwent.

The evaluation found that Changing Minds offers unique support for young people in Gwent. The peer-to-peer support and the penpal ‘Write With You’ project in particular are unlike any other service available for young people in Gwent. The beneficiaries of the service reported that the Changing Minds staff and volunteers were friendly and accessible. They were able to build trusting relationships with staff and with each other. They felt that they could contact the service at any time if they needed further support once their one-to-one support with a project worker or self-management course had ended. Although peer group support was not suitable for all referrals into Changing Minds, many young people commented that they benefitted from having opportunities to connect with their peers and felt they could openly engage with the group.

¹ <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld10016%20-%20report%20by%20the%20children.%20young%20people%20and%20education%20committee%20-%20inquiry%20into%20child%20and%20adolescent%20mental%20health/cr-ld10016-e.pdf>

SUMMARY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES

The Table below provides an assessment of whether the Changing Minds Project has achieved the outcomes it set out at the beginning of the funding period.

Stated project outcome	Achievement of outcome
<i>More young people will have access to more support with their mental health earlier and improved social networks through the peer support. They will be able to develop stronger relationships as a result of the skills learnt and the relationships made during the self-management courses.</i>	<p>OUTCOME ACHIEVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stakeholder interviews demonstrate that Changing Minds provides an accessible and valuable early intervention service and may help prevent mental health issues in young people from escalating, potentially reducing pressures on existing services - Beneficiary/volunteer interviews and the online survey demonstrate that young people make friends through Changing Minds which reduces social isolation - Analysis of the Changing Minds internal 'Wellness Wheel' data and the online survey show positive improvements in young people's wellbeing
<i>Young people with mental health problems will be able, through the project, to access three different and joined up methods of support, tailored to their individual needs, that through partnership working and stakeholder involvement, will act as a focus and a catalyst for influencing and improving the support young people get with their mental health from other organisations or services.</i>	<p>OUTCOME ACHIEVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many of the young people access more than one of the methods of support offered by Changing Minds - Beneficiaries reported they had a choice of support options which was tailored to their needs. The service was described as engaging and flexible. - The volunteer interviews demonstrate that by being supported by Changing Minds they developed the confidence and skills to support their peers and act as champions for the service - Stakeholder interviews suggest that Changing Minds is valued by other organisations and is seen as a reputable and reliable service
<i>More young people with mental health problems will have the support, learn the skills and develop the confidence to successfully manage transitions and lead full and active lives through accessing or providing peer support, attending the self management courses or being supported by a transitions worker.</i>	<p>OUTCOME ACHIEVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beneficiaries reported that Changing Minds staff were supportive and caring, which had a positive impact on their lives - They described highly positive experiences with Changing Minds. They received information about mental health issues and coping strategies as well as opportunities to connect with peers in a relaxed and non-clinical environment.

INTRODUCTION

PROJECT SYNOPSIS

The Changing Minds project is being run by Newport Mind and aims to improve the mental wellbeing of young people aged 14-25 in Gwent through peer to peer support, self-management courses and 1-to-1 support from a project worker. The service is open to anyone aged 14-25 living in Gwent. It is funded by a 5 year grant from the Big Lottery Fund and has run since 2013. WIHSC were been commissioned by Newport Mind Children and Young People's Service to evaluate their 'Changing Minds' service.

The Changing Minds was funded by the Big Lottery Fund to achieve four outcomes as follows:

1. More young people will have access to support with their mental health earlier and improved social networks through the peer support. They will be able to develop stronger relationships as a result of the skills learnt and the relationships made during the self-management courses.
2. There will be an increase in the number of new partnerships which have been developed with a range of statutory and third sector partners to ensure that the project is able to provide holistic services to help young people manage their mental health problems.
3. More young people with mental health problems will have the support, learn the skills and develop the confidence to successfully manage their mental health and lead full and active lives through accessing or providing peer support, attending the self-management courses or being supported by a Project Worker.
4. Evaluation of the Changing Minds project will be promoted widely at a local, regional and national level using the strength of the Mind network in Wales to advocate for improvement and changes. The self-management courses, peer support materials and transitions support framework will be developed so that other organisations and individuals can learn from and use the approaches.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The Welsh Institute for Health and Social Care was approached to provide independent evaluation services to the project between June and October 2017. Our role was to assess the impact and effectiveness of the Changing Minds project in achieving positive outcomes for young people accessing the service. This report, we hope, will make a contribution to influencing future approaches to mental health support for young people.

The findings in the report below are drawn from five principal evaluation methods:

1. Inferential statistics have been used to analyse the large dataset of outcomes that the project has collected on its service users. Outcomes were measured by the 'Wellness Wheel' (see Figure 1.1.below) and were collected at baseline when the beneficiary was assessed and at the end of the service ('follow-up'). Beneficiaries were asked a series of questions at each evaluation time-point:
 - I've been feeling relaxed
 - I've been dealing with my problems well
 - I've been feeling confident
 - I've been feeling close to other people
 - I've been feeling sure about things
 - I feel that there are places I belong
 - I've been able to make up my own mind about things

- I've been looking forward to the future
 - I've been feeling useful to other people
2. An online survey for beneficiaries was designed by WIHSC and hosted on the Bristol Online Survey (BOS) website. The link to the online survey was sent to young people who had used the Changing Minds service by the project manager via email, text and posting online. Completing the survey was optional and voluntary. Participants had the opportunity to withdraw at any point and did not have to answer all the questions. No personal details were requested from participants. All responses were collated and analysed as a group. Any identifiable information given by participants (e.g. in a free-text box) has been anonymised and will not be presented in this report in a way that could identify the individual participant. The survey data will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team.
 3. One volunteer focus group was held at the Changing Minds volunteer away day at Beechwood House in Newport. The discussion focused on the role of the volunteers and the impact of volunteering on the volunteers themselves and the young people they were supporting. Fifteen volunteers took part in the discussion, which lasted for 45 minutes. The focus group was 'graphically facilitated', meaning that as people were talking their words were simultaneously turned into pictures by WIHSC's graphical facilitator, Marina McDonald;
 4. Interviews were also held with key stakeholders. Contact details of referrers into the service was provided to the WIHSC by the project manager, who were then invited to take part in an interview. Eleven interviews were completed with stakeholders from a range of organisations, including Families First, CAMHS, primary care mental health, social services and school nurses/counsellors. These interviews focused on stakeholders experience with the Changing Minds service and the impact of the service on their organisation and the young people it supports.
 5. Qualitative interviews – either individually or as a group – were undertaken with 14 young people who had accessed Changing Minds services to hear their views about the support they had received and the impact of the service on their wellbeing.

This evaluation and methodology was reviewed and approved by the University of South Wales' Faculty of Life Sciences and Education Research Ethics Committee.

1. RESEARCH FINDINGS – OUTCOMES DATA

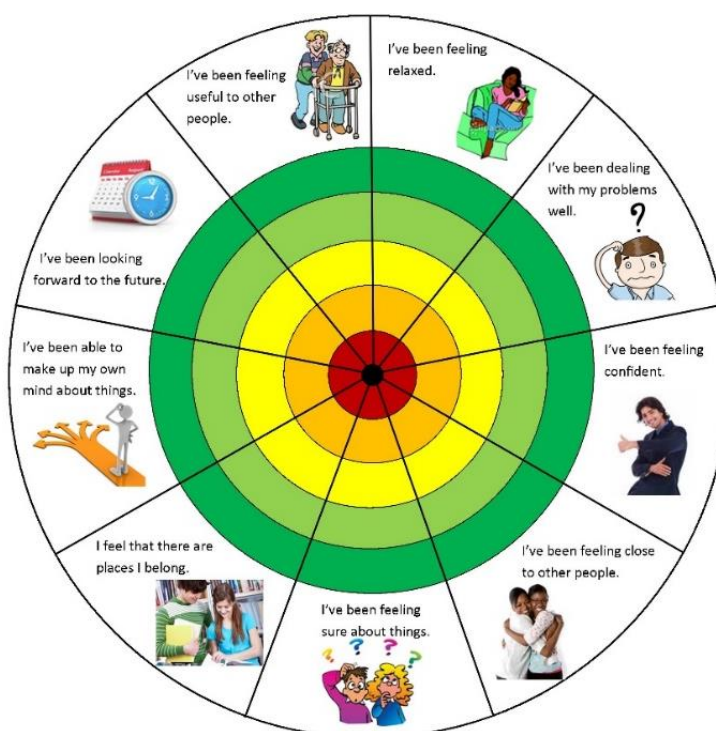
The WIHSC team looked at the data that is collected by the project about service users at the time of referral (baseline), and after the service has ended (follow-up).

APPROACH

Changing Minds service users complete a ‘Wellness Wheel’ outcome measure before and after receiving an intervention (see Figure 1.1). The Wellness Wheel was developed by Changing Minds in year 2 of the project to measure the projects impact on a young person’s mental wellbeing. The Wellness Wheel is an adaptation of three different scales to measure different aspects of mental wellbeing. The Wheel is completed on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 (“none of the time”) being the lowest score and 5 (“all of the time”) being the highest or best possible score.

WIHSC received anonymised data from Newport Mind for those individuals who had completed the Wellness Wheel at two time-points. Some individuals had received more than one service from Changing Minds and had completed the Wellness Wheel more than once. For those who had provided before and after scores more than once, the earliest and most recent scores were used in this analysis so that individuals were not counted more than once. It should be noted that this analysis includes individuals who received a range of interventions from Changing Minds and that the length of time between Wellness Wheel scores being taken varied widely, and may not have been taken directly before and after an intervention. Therefore assumptions about causality should be made with caution as we cannot necessarily infer that the support from Changing Minds directly caused any changes in scores. Particularly when some of the young people may also have been also receiving support from elsewhere (such as CAMHS or school counsellors). Data from all individuals is provided in Tables 1.1 and 1.2 below.

Figure 1.1 · Wellness Wheel



ANALYSIS

Several inferential statistical tests were performed on the dataset in order to determine whether the differences between groups or patterns that can be seen are likely to be part of a systematic trend, or whether they have occurred by chance. The names of these tests have been stated where appropriate

for completeness.

To interpret the findings, p-values can be examined. These values are calculated using the appropriate formula and represent the probability of a particular outcome occurring by chance- the value can vary between 0 and 1, and the smaller the value the less likely an outcome is occurring by chance and the more we can consider that there is a systematic effect (sometimes referred to as a significant outcome or result). The traditional cut-off point for a result to be accepted as statistically significant is 0.05 (i.e. 5%), so where p-values are presented they should be compared against this figure – any that are smaller than 0.05 are telling us that there is something interesting happening.

Number of interventions received

Out of the 327 young people for whom we had wellness wheel scores at baseline and follow-up, 81% (n=264) received one intervention, 46 received two interventions, 16 received three interventions and one young person received four interventions.

Changes to Wellness Wheel scores from baseline to follow-up

Table 1.1 shows the median outcomes for each item in the wellness wheel, based on young people who provided both a baseline and case-closed score. The median value (rather than the mean or mode) is used as for data like this as it is the best indicator of the typical service user and shows most clearly what changes, if any, might be anticipated in future. As can be seen in Table 1.1 there was an improvement in two of the domains, with median scores staying constant for seven of the outcomes statements.

Table 1.1 • Baseline and follow-up median outcomes scores

Outcome statement	Baseline score	Follow-up score	Net change
1. I've been feeling relaxed	3	3	No change
2. I've been dealing with my problems well	3	3	No change
3. I've been feeling confident	3	3	No change
4. I've been feeling close to other people	3	4	+1
5. I've been feeling sure about things	3	3	No change
6. I feel that there are places I belong	3	3	No change
7. I've been able to make up my own mind about things	3	3	No change
8. I've been looking forward to the future	3	4	+1
9. I've been feeling useful to other people	3	3	No change

Analyses were performed to determine whether there was a trend to the direction of change where changes were observed (Wilcoxon tests performed). Table 1.2 presents data about the number of young people whose responses to each outcome statement decreased, stayed the same, or improved. For example out of 324 responses to 'I've been feeling relaxed', 17% (n=56) respondents gave a worse score at follow-up than at baseline, 47% (n=151) gave the same score at both time-points and 36% (n=117) showed an improved score. The proportion of individuals who improved was significantly different to the proportion who deteriorated ($p<0.01$).

Indeed, all outcomes were significant ($p<0.01$), with the vast majority of changes, where they occurred,

being positive – see Table 1.2. So although few changes in median scores were identified (as seen in Table 1.1) there were generally few cases where young people gave a poorer outcome score at follow-up compared to baseline.

Table 1.2 • Wellness Wheel ‘direction’ from baseline to follow-up - percentage

Outcome statement	Decreased (%)	No Change (%)	Improved (%)	TOTAL (n=)	p
1. I’ve been feeling relaxed	17	47	36	324	<.01
2. I’ve been dealing with my problems well	17	49	34	325	<.01
3. I’ve been feeling confident	16	45	39	325	<.01
4. I’ve been feeling close to other people	20	47	33	325	<.01
5. I’ve been feeling sure about things	15	53	31	325	<.01
6. I feel that there are places I belong	19	46	35	325	<.01
7. I’ve been able to make up my own mind about things	19	48	33	325	<.01
8. I’ve been looking forward to the future	16	44	40	325	<.01
9. I’ve been feeling useful to other people	14	49	37	324	<.01

SUMMARY

Key findings from this section of the analysis of the Changing Minds project data are as follows:

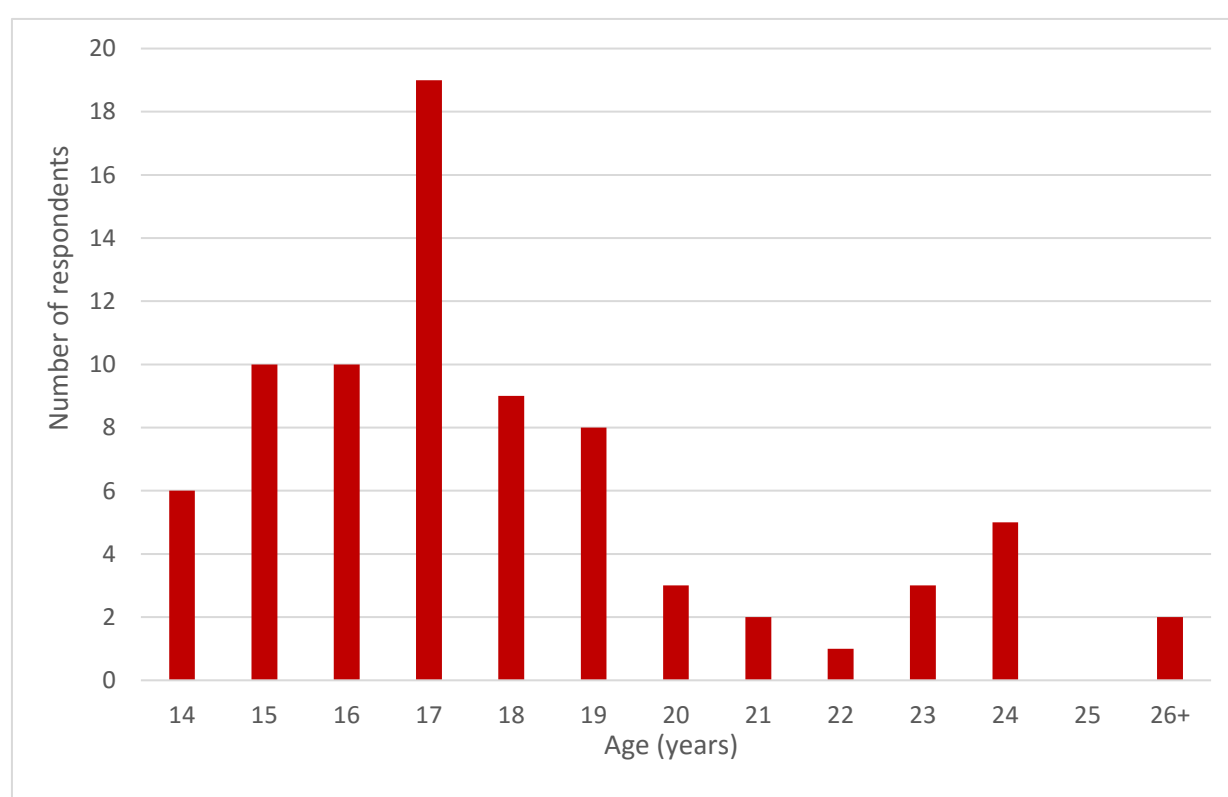
- The Wellness Wheel scores collected by Changing Minds shows that baseline median scores were moderate (e.g. scores of three out of five for all questions)
- Although there were few changes in median scores over time, there were generally few cases where young people gave a poorer outcome score at follow-up compared to baseline
- The fact that many individuals gave the same score at baseline and follow-up should not be under-valued, as this may well represent a beneficial impact of the service, given that maintaining wellbeing scores over a period of time is important.

2. RESEARCH FINDINGS – ONLINE SURVEY

The survey was designed by the WIHSC team and hosted using the Bristol Online Survey tool. The survey was open for one month in September 2017. The link to the survey was distributed to past and present Changing Minds service users by the service manager via text and email. A reminder was sent two weeks after the initial invitation. 81 respondents completed the online survey.

Of the 81 respondents, 65 (80%) were female, and 14 (17%) were male. One respondent preferred to self-describe their gender and one chose not to disclose their gender. The age of survey respondents is shown in Figure 2.1 below. A majority of respondents were aged between 14 and 19 years, with fewer of those completing the survey being aged 20 years and over. Three respondents did not disclose their age.

Figure 2.1 • Age of survey respondents



Survey respondents were asked which Changing Minds services they had used. As shown in Table 2.1, the most commonly used service was the self-management courses (n=28), followed by the individual support from a project worker (n=24). Nine respondents were volunteers for the project and had not used any of the services. Seven respondents volunteered for the project and had also used the service. Whilst most of the survey respondents had used only one Changing Minds service, nine respondents had used two of the services, five respondents had used three services, and one respondent had used four services.

Table 2.1 • Services used by survey respondents

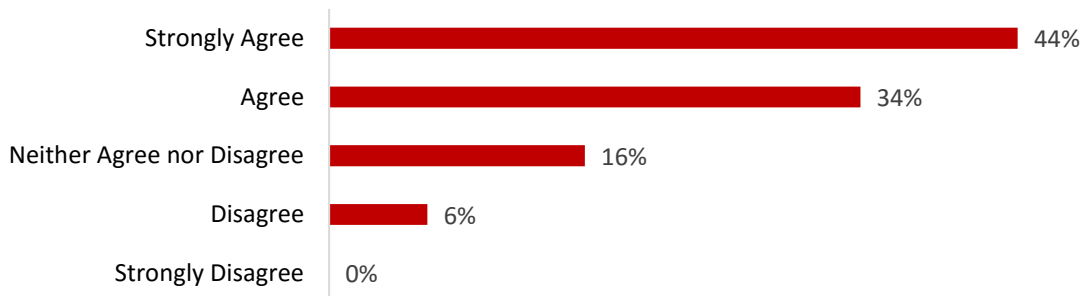
Changing Minds Service	N
Self-Management Course	28
Young Persons Advisory Panel	5
Peer-to-peer support group	19
One-to-one support with a project worker	24
Write with You	14
I volunteer with Changing Minds	16

A majority of survey respondents stated that they had been referred to Changing Minds by someone else e.g. a doctor, teacher or family member (n=63, 79%). Twelve (15%) had contacted Changing Minds themselves. Three did not know how they had come into contact with Changing Minds.

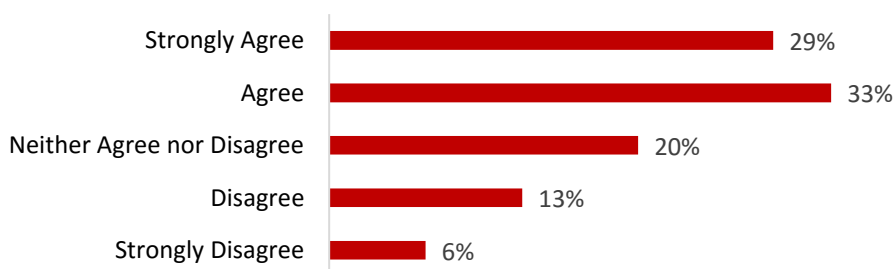
The following section of the survey asked respondents to rate their experience of the Changing Minds service by reporting the extent to which they agree or disagree with 8 statements about the service. Figure 2.2 shows the results of this section. As can be seen in the graphs below, a majority of respondents said they had say in the decision to get support from Changing Minds (78%) and almost two-thirds said that the support offered was right for them (62%). The most positive result was that 82% agreed or strongly agreed that they felt listened to at Changing Minds, with only 5% disagreeing. Respondents reported knowing who to contact if further help was needed, with only 9% disagreeing with that statement. Results were more mixed regarding making friends through Changing Minds, with 38% neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement that they had made friends in the service. Over half (59%) reported that they had learnt new skills to use in their everyday life and a quarter (25%) neither agreed nor disagreed with that statement. Changing Minds helped nearly half (47%) of respondents with a change in their life, such as in education, employment or at home. 30% neither agreed nor disagreed with that statement. The statement with the most disagreement related to Changing Minds helping people get support from another agency or person. 30% disagreed with that statement, suggesting it was not relevant to them. However, 38% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that Changing Minds helped them access other support.

Figure 2.2 · Experience of Changing Minds

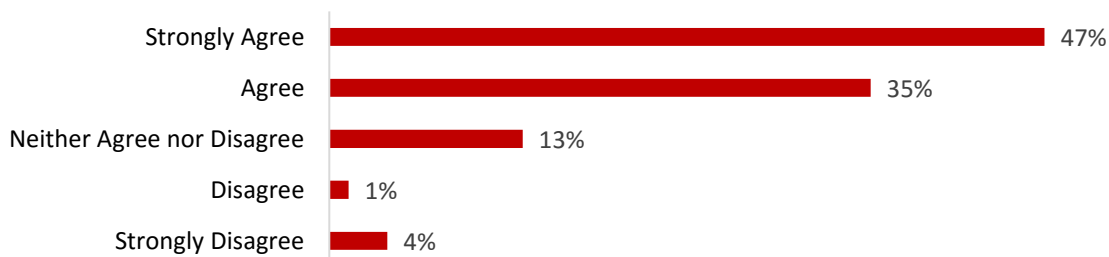
a. I had a say in the decision to get support from Changing Minds



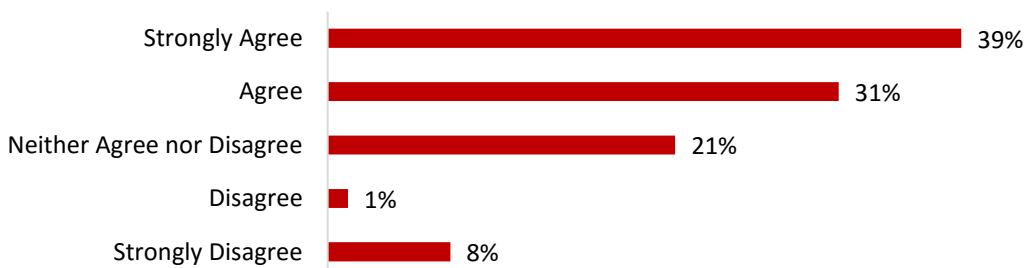
b. The support offered by Changing Minds was right for me



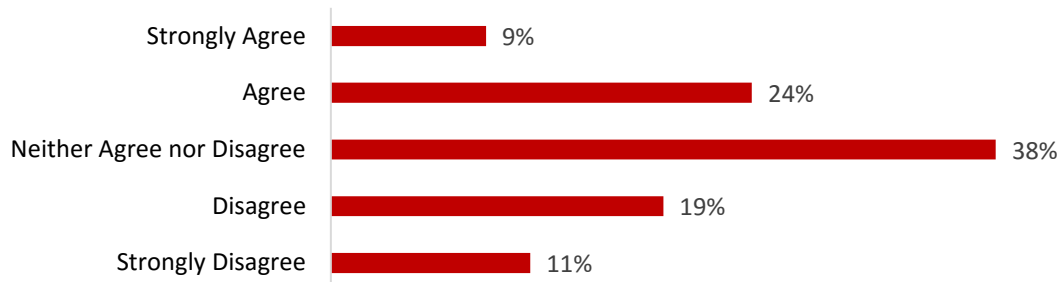
c. I am listened to at Changing Minds



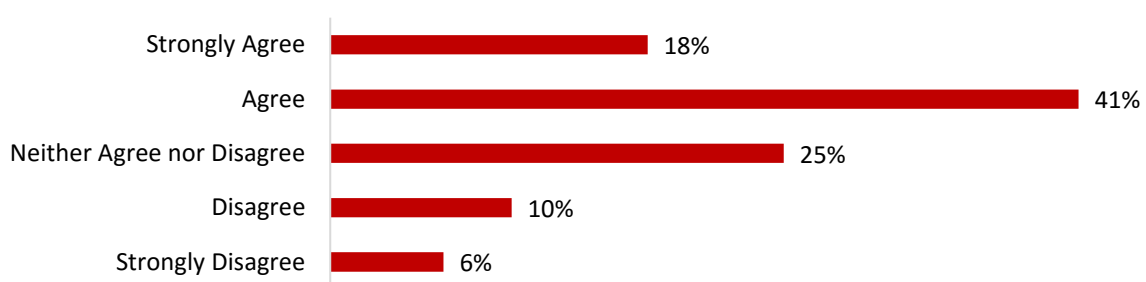
d. I know who to contact if I need help



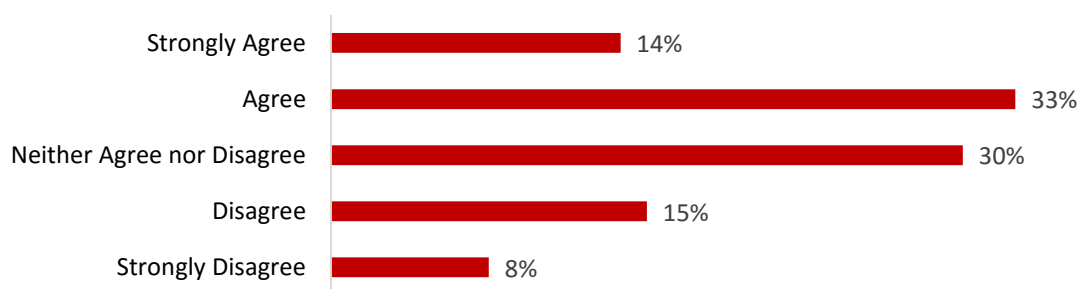
e. I have made friends through Changing Minds



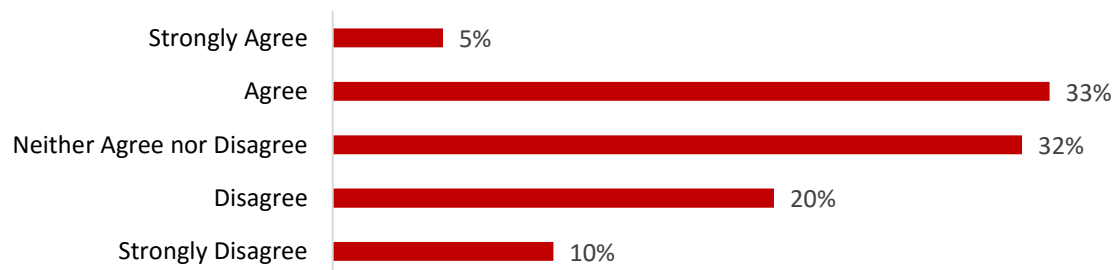
f. I have learnt new skills that I can use in my day-to-day life



g. Changing Minds has helped me with a change in my life (for example, a change at school, home, work)

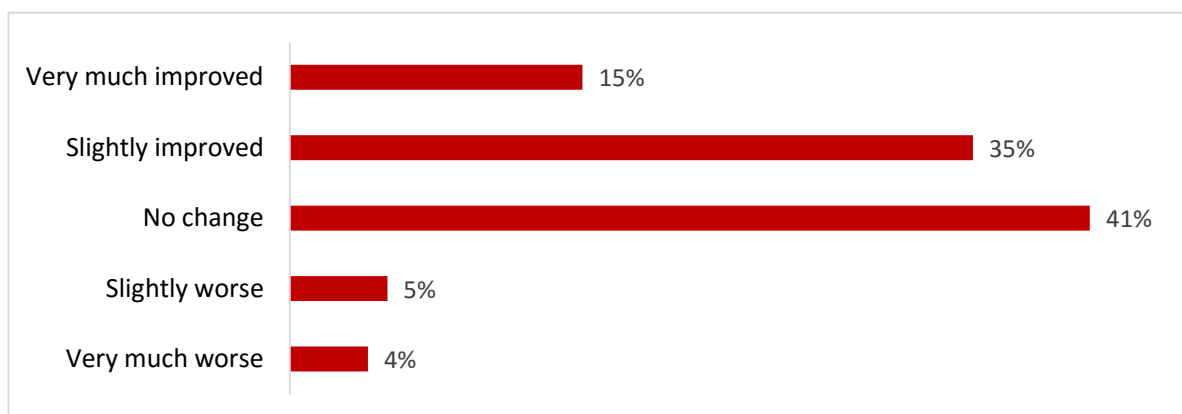


h. Changing Minds has helped me to get support from another agency/person



The final question in this section asked respondents how they would describe any changes in their mental well-being since being involved with Changing Minds. As shown in Figure 2.3 below, only 9% (n=7) said that their mental being had got slightly worse (n=4) or very much worse (n=3). Half (50%) reported an improvement and 41% reported no change.

Figure 2.3 · How would you describe any changes in your mental well-being since you have been involved with Changing Minds?



Respondents were invited to write a comment regarding their answers to the above questions. Fifty respondents wrote a free-text comment, which varied in length and detail (comments were not limited in the survey by number of characters). 20 of those who reported some improvement in their mental well-being provided a free-text comment. Some of these comments reflected on the skills and knowledge learnt for coping with life events and negative behaviours or emotions;

“I have more coping strategies and I find it hard to trust people but the project worker is very understanding and easy to talk too so I've been able to talk with her truthfully”

“I no longer self harm, If I ever feel the need to, I go to "my bubble" where I use different strategies to help me relax.”

“It has helped give me the tools to cope with things better but I still have to try very hard to implement them”

“I've learnt to take on new skills and focus on moving forward. I also know there's support out there if I ever need it, I've just got to ask. I've set goals and I will get to them in time.”

“The large variety of coping strategies offered helps to build a large repertoire of advice to draw from when experiencing bad mental health. The staff have a welcoming manner that welcomes you back each time. In summary, it gives you the tools to help yourself, it's up to you if you use them.”

“My condition has not changed much however I have learnt lifelong skills in managing my diagnosis, symptoms and emotions.”

Others reported a general improvement in their well-being;

“I felt better about myself”

“As a volunteer for this project, I feel that the information I have learned from the training has had a boost on my mood and my outlook on certain things”

“I feel more positive”

Some reported on specific issues that Changing Minds had helped with, including attending university, confidence, depression, and being discharged from mental health services.

“Found one to one helpful for dealing with issues moving to uni. Peer support was great for increasing social interaction and getting me out”

"It helped me become more confident. I don't feel as angry or as anxious as I used to be. Also I feel more content and my life has got a lot better since."

"I have learnt how to not be late for work by getting up earlier and setting off earlier, this has helped a lot with my anxiety. Also my depression has improved by me taking time for my self to go for half hour walks in the evening to help with my weight loss which makes me feel a lot better and not so down and lazy all the time."

"I have been discharged from Mind and from CAHMS, Mind was a massive help to achieve this"

One of the comments reflected on the social nature of the groups being beneficial; *"People listened and helped and it made me realise I wasn't the only one struggling with things"*

21 individuals reported on why their mental well-being had not changed since being involved in the service. For some it was due to being a volunteer only, whilst others had not been with the service for long enough for it to make a significant impact.

"I am not involved with Changing Minds due to my mental health, I am involved in helping others with their mental health. Therefore, my mental state has not changed in any way."

"I have only met with my support worker"

"I have only completed training as a volunteer so there hasn't been time for changing minds to have an impact. Also my mental well-being is positive anyway."

"My moods and thoughts haven't changed"

"Haven't had any support yet. I met up with a women but since then nothing has been shown to me etc"

"I have not had any appointments with anyone nor am i able to attend any talks either due to anxiety or short notice."

"Everything I was told I already knew"

For those young people who reported that their mental well-being had gotten slightly or very much worse, comments related to not being involved with Changing Minds for some time, or the support given by Changing Minds not being appropriate or timely.

"It fluctuates but it's not related to my volunteering with them. I will soon be participating in one of their self-help courses, however."

"I haven't seen [project worker] for some time and I have been struggling loads with living my life."

"After being involved with Changing Minds I have found my mental wellbeing has gotten worse"

"The support wasn't right for me, and the person I was talking to didn't have enough resources to help me."

"Unfortunately due to waiting lists I was only seen a couple of times and had left college before I was able to be seen again"

When asked if they would recommend Changing Minds to other young people, the response was very positive with 73% of young people saying they would recommend the service, with only 7% (n=6) saying they wouldn't and 20% who did not know.

SUPPORT FROM CHANGING MINDS

The survey also asked respondents to describe the support they had from Changing Minds. 62 respondents wrote a comment in this section. A vast majority of these comments were positive and reflected on the help from the staff at Changing Minds and the nature of support provided. For example, the staff were described as *“supportive, considerate and extremely kind”*. They were also praised for being approachable and easy to talk to. One comment in particular was very encouraging about the support provided by Changing Minds; *“Responsive, Patient, Kind, Caring, Genuine, Helpful, Important, Essential, Supportive. So so many words could describe how wonderful and important the information and support I received was. Equipping me with knowledge, understanding, techniques, self-belief and confidence to manage my experiences was the focus of my work with changing minds.”*

Other comments suggested that the young people accessing the service feel able to talk about their issues because they feel that they are genuinely listened to in a non-judgemental way:

“My worker listens well and always gives advice. I had trouble opening up about things but she made me feel comfortable and relaxed when speaking”

“It's really helpful, I find it easy to talk to my project worker about most stuff in our one to one's - those are the most helpful for me I think”

“I think the woman I was working with ...I know she is no longer with the company but she was amazing, she helped me gain my confidence about speaking up about my problems and helped me find the right help I needed. Although the time I had with her was short I felt a massive connection and felt like I made a friend for life. She helped me massively about how I deal with certain situations and how to move forward.”

“Personalised and accepting. I didn't feel like I was bothering or hassling them and they offered me help without prying. I felt in control of the situation but supported as well.”

“The support was good. Everybody listened. I felt comfortable about opening up to people. Nobody judged or had prejudices.”

As in some of the previous comments, some individuals described that Changing Minds was informative – it gave them useful information about mental health issues and coping mechanisms. Volunteers also reported gaining useful knowledge and skills from their training and experience;

“Really useful to learn about symptoms of mental health issues, which has helped me with my own and other people's mental health.”

“Very interesting it helps a lot by understanding what anxiety and depression is and how to kind of control it.”

There were, however, some less positive comments which often related to the young person feeling that the support was inadequate to meet their needs, perhaps requiring more specialist care for their mental health issues;

“The support I received has had little effect. The reason being the treatment I received was only for a short duration. At the time of receiving I did feel some progress in overcoming my anxiety. However, the treat wasn't long enough to fully grasp the coping mechanisms. I feel that I have slip back to a state before my treatment.”

“It didn't meet my needs as I need more professional support”

"Not too great. Was just like talking to a friend, which I needed more than."

Nine respondents reported that they hadn't used any Changing Minds service nor volunteered in the service. When asked why they hadn't used any service, responses included:²

"I'm not too sure what I have used but I was seeing [project worker]"

"I was waiting to be referred on a waiting list and didn't hear anything back."

"The training to volunteer showed me I was too young and didn't feel it was the right opportunity for me"

"Not interested in group sessions"

"I haven't been refereed for that long, and i have not been able to attend any talks."

"Can't get any help in my area"

"Never got a reply"

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

When asked about any suggestions for improvements for Changing Minds, most individuals who commented stated that they could not think of anything. However, two respondents suggested that there could be more of a presence in schools;

"Maybe, more of a presence in schools, perhaps offering an LGBTQ+ service and advertising that in schools. I feel like schools are not always well equipped to deal with theese specific issues, or even just providing an education."

"It would be beneficial for schools to have Changing Minds as an extra programme."

Other suggestions included reducing waiting times; *"More people creating the support so that people get seen sooner, it took a year for me to actually get to see someone. Which for some people is too long"*. Several commented on the time-limited nature of the service and that they would have benefited from receiving more continuous support;

"I only had an hour once a week, for 12 weeks. I think I could have benefitted more from more a bit more support but am still happy with what I received"

"A continuous support group run by a staff member, integrating the skills and techniques, teaching and information included in all the courses"

"More than 12 one to one sessions"

COMPARISON WITH OTHER SERVICES

49 people (61%) reported that they had had some involvement from another agency or person for mental health issues (such as CAMHS, Social Services, GP, Community Mental Health team). Most reported seeing multiple agencies, for example, 27 reported that they had been referred to CAMHS, 23 had seen their GP. Other services mentioned included primary care mental health, social services, and counsellors. We asked these individuals to describe if and how their experience with Changing Minds differed from their experience with other services. 37 individuals wrote a response, many of which

² Spelling has been corrected in some of the quotes for ease of reading

described a more positive experience with Changing Minds. Several young people commented that the waiting time for Changing Minds was a lot quicker than for NHS mental health services; *“Changing Minds was a much better experience than other groups I have been with. The referral process was stunningly fast (I had a course booked within two weeks of being referred), whereas other groups can take months. I am still new to the project so I have only attended one course so far, but that course really hit the nail on the head and was highly beneficial. I didn't expect to enjoy sessions with a group but I actually found it quite reassuring that others were having similar experiences.”*

This is related to the urgency of support that is needed for some young people, who cannot afford the long wait to access other mental health services;

“I was referred to changing minds by my mum as the wait for the primary care mental health team was over 6 months and I needed support quicker”

“Compared to my GP it was definitely a lot quicker for someone my age, as I am only young I had to be put on waiting list after waiting list, for many different therapists, to the point where my mental health got too much to handle.”

Some young people did comment that the support they had from CAMHS was more suitable, which suggests that they needed more specialised mental health care;

“Very different. Changing Minds was quick, and CAMHS are slow, but have provided better service thus far. I think this was just because the 'Write with You' support was the wrong choice out of the available options”

“I think that my treatment with CAHMS is proving to be more effective than with Changing Minds, as they're working harder to combat many problems with me - for example insomnia, depression, anxiety and how to deal with chronic pain too.”

“The support at CAMHS was more suited to me, however when I turned 18 I couldn't continue with their support as a legal adult”

In contrast, having experienced a range of services, other young people preferred the less formal, non-clinical support at Changing Minds and also benefited from the range of support services that Changing Minds offers;

“I definitely felt more welcome and at ease with Changing Minds than the support meeting I had at my GP clinic (years ago). I could contact them in a way I felt comfortable and the person I spoke to was approachable and kind. I felt supported but not pressured. I'm currently on a waiting list for one of their courses.”

“Changing Minds was much more personable and less formal than NHS services. Didn't have to wait as long and more services available up front at changing minds.”

“Changing Minds definitely had the biggest impact on me, as I feel the project much suits me and was very understanding; they did not rush into things, they took it step by step, which I prefer. CAMHS however, was great, but I had to wait a long time and by the time they had given me a date, I was already on my second session with Changing Minds.”

Many individuals also commented on the social nature of the group support offered at Changing Minds – they were an opportunity to meet other young people in a similar situation;

"I much preferred Mind because they were so supportive and offered multiple different groups with different goals and people. I met fantastic new friends who understood my situation."

"I have found that staff of Changing Minds are more engaging and friendly than that of other services I have been involved with. The waiting times are not too long and I can meet new people. At CAMHS, I have received some good help, but social services hasn't been good."

SUMMARY

Key findings from this section of the project evaluation are as follows:

- Of the 81 respondents to the online survey, a majority gave positive views about the Changing Minds service.
- Young people generally felt that the service offered by Changing Minds was right for them, and they felt listened to by staff and volunteers. This was also reflected in the free-text comments where many reported that the service was friendly, accessible and non-judgemental.
- The service also seemed to be effective at providing young people with the skills and knowledge to cope better with day-to-day life and manage their mood and emotions more appropriately.
- Fewer respondents reported that Changing Minds had helped them seek further support from another agency. This may be due to the fact that many respondents had already sought help from other services such as primary care and specialist tertiary mental health services before being referred to Changing Minds.
- Whilst a majority of respondents reported not having made friends through Changing Minds, many of the free-text comments reported on the benefits of group support with other young people.
- When asked to reflect on their experience with Changing Minds compared to other mental health services for young people, many reported a more timely and friendly service, whilst recognising that the support offered by Changing Minds might not be appropriate for everyone referred into the service.
- Suggestions for improvements to the Changing Minds service included having more sessions with the one-to-one support and self-management courses, shorter waiting times for some services and an increased presence in local schools.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS – BENEFICIARIES

This chapter presents data from interviews with 14 young people who had accessed one or more service at Changing Minds. Participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary and young people were not obliged to answer any questions that they did not feel comfortable doing so. The data was independently gathered and analysed by researchers from WIHSC. The discussions were transcribed and thematically analysed, and these key themes are presented below.

TIMELY AND ACCESSIBLE • *You can text or call if you need help...*

The young people who took part in a discussion group had accessed Changing Minds via a number of different routes, which include being referred by mental health practitioners, Barnardo's, Families First, Careers Wales, school counsellor and family members. Some beneficiaries had accessed several of the Changing Minds services including one-to-one support, 'write with you', the self-management courses, and peer mentor support. It became apparent during the interviews that the young people really liked having a choice of support options at Changing Minds. They were also able to try the various groups on offer without having to commit if they felt it wasn't for them;

"In Changing Minds in that first sessions they'll say 'do want a 1-2-1 session? Do you want a group session? Do you want to do peer mentoring? And they tailor it to you"

"You get to choose your support. Whereas if you go through something like CAMHS, it's slightly different where you feel forced to take one of them. Whereas with this [Changing Minds] you don't have to choose one. You can go home and come back to it and think about it. You can do it in your own time."

"When I asked about the groups she said I didn't have to go for it"

"Here you can actually have a choice over what you do whereas with other places they are kind of like 'you have to do this' because this is what you need, whereas here they ask you what you think you need and they work around?"

Although some of the young people we spoke to were on a waiting list for a self-management course or a peer mentor group, mostly the waiting times for Changing Minds were perceived to be reasonably short, especially when compared to other services for mental health such as CAMHS or counselling services. Several of the young people reported having used other services in the past or currently being on a waiting list (most often for CAMHS), having experienced mental health issues such as depression, anxiety or self-harm. Those individuals who had used other services compared their experiences with Changing Minds and described how they were able to access the services provided by Changing Minds in a timely manner; *'waiting time here is ridiculously low...whereas compared to CAMHS you're waiting for years'*. They reported that they needed support a lot quicker than the NHS was able to provide it because by the time they were referred to mental health services they were often at a crisis point. This suggests that there is a high demand for lower level mental health support such as Changing Minds, as waiting times for higher tier services are often too long and individuals would benefit from support before their well-being deteriorates;

"When I was on one of the waiting lists I was worried I was going to commit suicide before they actually helped me".

"I was stuck in hospital for a week waiting for a CAMHS person to show up for an hour and then leave. Don't get me wrong, having the NHS and CAMHS and all that support is great but it's only good if you're on deaths door basically"

The staff at Changing Minds were easily accessible. Beneficiaries reported knowing who to contact if they needed help and feeling comfortable to call a project worker if they wanted further support; "[project worker] said if you need a catch-up just text me and arrange things, so it's easy to do...I messaged her and said I really need a catch-up and it helped a lot". Some of the interviewees did mention that they would like longer sessions with Changing Minds, as at the end of the courses or contact with a project worker they felt 'torn away too soon'. One of the beneficiaries described how she looked forward to the self-management course all week and was anxious about the course coming to an end.

FRIENDLY AND CARING · It's more like talking to a friend...

The staff at Changing Minds were also described as friendly and caring. The young people reported having built close and trusting relationships with project workers and therefore felt comfortable talking about their problems and issues. This appeared to stem from the project workers having the time to get to know the young person and build these relationships;

"You don't always have to talk about your mental health with them, you can just talk about like TV shows sometimes and what's going on, like books and school. It wasn't always about what was wrong"

"It's more like talking to a friend, so it's therapeutic like that. Whereas doctors try and relate you to a textbook"

"With this place I feel like I actually know people and I have a clear way of linking up with them if I need to"

The beneficiaries also appreciated the non-clinical nature of the service. They described feeling relaxed in the less formal setting of Changing Minds compared to clinical mental health services; *"with the one-on-one sessions it felt like they were more of a friend just having a chat because we'd have a cup of tea, we'd be in a familiar place. It just felt like you were catching up with a friend. Whereas with a therapist or a counsellor they'd just be writing stuff down."* As demonstrated in the following quote, young people also felt that they were treated as an individual and really listened to at Changing Minds;

"They seem interested as well, they actually do care and other people they tend to not really seem that interested. They'll be just writing stuff down, not really taking in how you're feeling and other things...this place, they'll message you and make sure you're coming and stuff like that, which is nice."

This sense of being cared for and listened to was mentioned several times throughout the discussions and was very important for the young people who were interviewed. They had often felt treated 'as a number' and not taken seriously by others including doctors and family members. Sometimes this was due to their age and they often felt they were spoken to 'like a kid'; *"I think people underestimate how many 14 year olds have problems. People think because you're 14 you have no problems."* At Changing Minds the young people felt that the staff genuinely cared about their well-being and made an effort to help them through tough times, whether that was by taking time to talk through their problems or acting as an advocate;

“Someone from here [Changing Minds] came to a CAMHS appointment with me because they knew I was anxious about going and it kind of proved that they actually cared. They actually cared about my situation and me getting better.”

“It was only here that someone actually sat down with me explained to me what was happening to me. Like CAMHS they kind of generalised it, like everyone goes through this whereas here they accept that you’re an individual person, if that makes sense.”

Related to this feeling of being cared for was the sense of not being judged by the staff or fellow peers at Changing Minds. The young people felt that they were able to talk freely without fear of ridicule or disregard; *“I can’t talk to my mum so when I come here and talk to these guys it’s really nice and I don’t get that judgement... At college I get judged...when here you get nice people and it’s really nice and welcoming and it’s great. It’s like a second home.”*

This made a lot of difference to the young people involved in Changing Minds and as shown in the following section, the support from Changing Minds often had a big impact on the beneficiaries.

INFORMATION AND PEER SUPPORT · I’ve made lots of new friends here...

The main benefits of Changing Minds that was described by the beneficiaries was the information provided about mental health issues, useful strategies to manage their mood and emotions, and the opportunities to connect with other young people who may have had similar experiences. Many of the young people interviewed said that they didn’t know anyone on the courses or groups before getting involved with Changing Minds and that they had made friends in the service. Some also said that they didn’t have any friends or people they could talk openly with outside of Changing Minds. It became apparent throughout the discussions that Changing Minds provided a safe space where young people could talk openly and share their experiences with other young people. This was highly valued by the beneficiaries of the service;

“It helps you feel like you’re not the only one that’s suffering it. It shows that because with depression you feel so alone with it, but being able to meet with people doing exactly the same, you feel stronger.”

“There’s loads of people, there’s an entire Facebook group now. You realise you’re not the only one”

“I’ve made lots of new friends here and just share my feelings with people who are in the same position as me and listen to what they have to say. It’s worked out fine for me. It really helps socialising with people who you have similarities with...You share your feelings with people who have the same feelings as you as well and also share some ideas for activities and so on.”

“I’ve told this group here more about me than I have any of my friends in the past.”

This was also true for some of those beneficiaries who had gone on to become volunteers at Changing Minds; *“One of the volunteers I met at training and now he’s one of my best friends. People become part of your life and you don’t really expect it. It’s really good. A good way of meeting people.”*

Some of the interviewees suggested increasing publicity for the Changing Minds service, having more of a presence in schools and extending the age range to a younger age (before 14 years old) to encourage more people into the service. They all said they would recommend the service to other young people as they described a range of positive impacts of Changing Minds, including increased confidence, reduced social anxiety, reduced depression, and reduced isolation;

"It's built my confidence. I know I used to hang around with the wrong people but from talking about it I've realised that there is more than just the wrong things."

"When I started, if you saw me then, I would not speak to you, mental health was really bad for me then. But then slowly my confidence increased."

"You do leave this place with a smile on your face"

One interviewee also described how her relationships with her family had improved since being referred to Changing Minds; *"Me and my sister used to argue like mad but since I started coming here we're slowly getting back on track."* Changing Minds sometimes had a very strong impact on the lives of the young people, as demonstrated in the following, quite powerful, quote; *"This time last year I had no friends, no prospects for a future and honestly I was ready to just slit my wrists and stop embarrassing myself. These people saved my life, there's no two ways about it."*

SUMMARY

Key findings from this section of the project evaluation are as follows:

- The young people interviewed for this evaluation highly valued the support provided by Changing Minds.
- Staff were described as friendly, caring, non-judgemental, accessible and supportive. The young people felt that staff really got to know them as individuals and therefore they felt comfortable in sharing their experiences.
- The less formal, non-clinical environment of the Changing Minds service was favourably compared to the clinical setting of NHS and other mental health services.
- Although some young people were on waiting lists for a Changing Minds service, generally they were able to access support in a timely manner.
- The opportunities to connect with peers in a supportive group setting was highly beneficial to the young people who were interviewed. They reported feeling able to be talk openly and make new friends. A strong online community also appeared to be forming via Facebook.
- The support from Changing Minds had made a big impact on the young people's confidence, emotions, behaviour, and their outlook on life.
- There were few suggestions for improvement which included publicising the service more widely (especially in schools), lowering the age that people are able to access the service, and making the courses of a longer duration.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS - VOLUNTEERS

This chapter presents data from the discussion group undertaken with 15 volunteers at their away day at Beechwood House in August 2017. The discussion was transcribed and thematically analysed, and these key themes are presented below. The discussion was also 'graphically facilitated', meaning that as people were talking their words were simultaneously turned into pictures by WIHSC's graphical facilitator, Marina McDonald.

GETTING INVOLVED

The volunteers all described a range of reasons for getting involved with Changing Minds. Some had been supported by Changing Minds as service users whilst others had no previous personal experience of mental health issues and were looking for volunteering opportunities. Those who had used Changing Minds services described how they had benefitted from the help provided by Mind and therefore wanted to use their experiences to help other young people who maybe going through similar situations;

"I felt I had to pay back Mind for all the help, so I started volunteering...I tried to champion Mind as much as possible"

"Through Changing Minds in particular they've helped me through stuff like depression, anxiety and stuff like that"

The volunteer training provided by Changing Minds was viewed as being very useful and comprehensive. Topics covered included safeguarding, confidentiality, recognising symptoms and suicide prevention; *"covers all things to do with youth work as well as mental health"*. The volunteers also described how the training had been supplemented by their experiences working alongside Changing Minds' staff; *"they've obviously taught us more as we've progressed through"*.

EXPERIENCES OF VOLUNTEERING

The volunteers described a range of activities that they had been involved in Changing Minds. These included forming the Young Persons' Advisory Panel (YPAP), being a pen pal for the 'Write with You' service, organising and facilitating peer mentor group sessions, attending and speaking at conferences and publicising the service. The young people talked about some of the challenges involved in volunteering for the service. For example, being a pen pal was sometimes difficult due to the sporadic nature of communication with the service user; *"It can be difficult because you don't know if someone will stop needing your help. So you'll be talking to for example Jonny one week and then you don't hear from Jonny for like 6 weeks and then all of sudden you get someone else coming through. I'm not saying you need to know what happened but sometimes you're unsure and you're waiting for a letter that may never come again."*

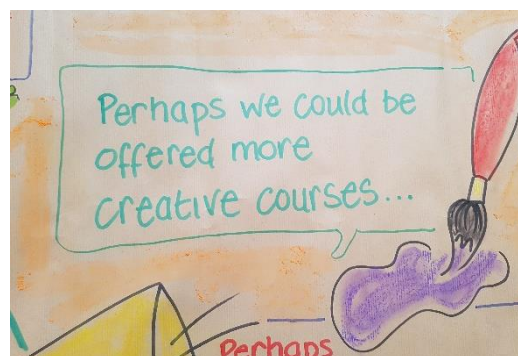
Regarding the peer mentor groups, the volunteers appeared to play a significant role in shaping the content and structure of the sessions. This was very much valued by the volunteers who liked having the responsibility of organising the groups; *"We came up with a rota, so who was going to do what weeks, we have a lot of volunteers. So two volunteers will run it. We have a list of ideas for each week so we've got something to do and we can basically say 'here's what we've got, you guys can pick what appeals to you most' and then we've got a bit of structure to the week. It is still fun to wing it and you don't really have a set... but it makes it a bit easier to come up with ideas because there's already a list for you"*

It became apparent during the discussion that the volunteers' ideas are listened to and acted upon by Changing Minds staff and managers. Volunteers felt that they have an important voice in shaping the services provided. The YPAP is significant in this and is an effective forum for young people to help make changes and have a say in every aspect of how the project is run. The YPAP also holds a 'virtual' forum online, which makes it easier for young people to contribute their views;

"We come together and share our ideas across the whole project and go to the manager and go 'we want this, make it happen' then we will come up with some ideas about how to make it happen".

"We can say this is good, this is good, this needs changing, and that gets carried down the grapevine, then it comes in...I'm really excited about it...I'm very happy that people listen to me."

Some of the volunteers' suggestions for Changing Minds included having more structure in the peer mentor support groups, improving the information on the Changing Minds website by keeping it updated and publishing dates of the self-management courses, publicising the service more to encourage more young people to use the service, and providing art-based courses.



As well as having a say in the project, volunteers also felt well supported by Changing Minds staff, who were readily available and easily accessible;

"I always know that there's a member of staff nearby if I need them. They don't stay in the room but I always know if there's a problem or any issue I can just turn to one of the staff members and it's fine. They give advice on these things and I think they're pretty good overall with the support."

"I've had a positive experience at Mind, mainly because of the people in it. So I would say good staff, good volunteers, teaching good mental health"

IMPACT OF VOLUNTEERING

A range of positive impacts of the Changing Minds service were described by volunteers, for both themselves and the young people that they were helping to support. They talked about how the service provides a 'safe space' for young people to share their experiences. Although there was often no formal discussion about mental health issues, the volunteers felt that this provision was beneficial for those young people attending;

"We've done peer mentor groups where they've just played hangman for the whole hour and a half and not talked about why they're there – it tends to be like more of a release, a safe space where don't have to talk, unless they want to talk about it, but they don't tend to it just tends to be somewhere to go to chill out a bit and forget about it"

"In ours we don't necessarily force anyone to talk about mental health but if they did want to talk about it they know that there's support there and that they can talk to us, if they felt they wanted to."

"Peer mentor groups seem more like a safe space than anything. People come from home or school and just show up to the group and talk. I'm really big on the more informative side so I would be

the one who's trying to force the agenda like 'hey, do you want to talk about things, let me give you this resource sheet?' It turns it into a safe space"

Similarly with the Write with You project, there wasn't a requirement to talk about mental health issues and the volunteers let their pen pal set the tone of the correspondence; *"I'm talking to someone at the moment and it's just been 6 letters about music and TV shows. I'm happy to talk about other stuff but a lot of them don't seem to want to do it and I prefer for them to broach the subject rather than me to encourage it. But all the people I've spoke to have all talked about something other than why they're there."*

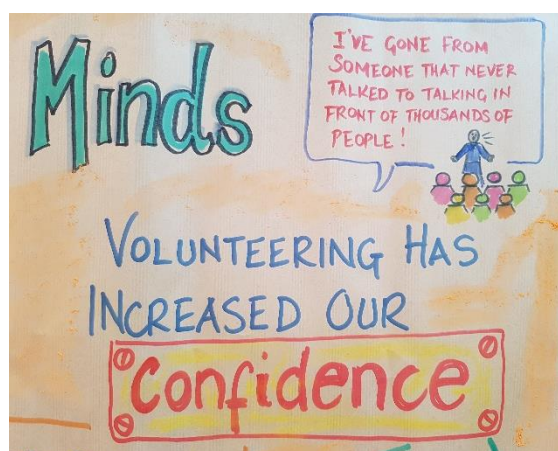


The volunteers also reported having made friends with each other and being able to support each other. There was a good sense of camaraderie amongst the volunteers; *"It's a really good way to meet friends, everyone's really nice. Meet other people in the same mind-set as well. So you don't have to talk about the issues but if you did they'd understand."*

One of the volunteers described how being involved in the service provided him with an understanding of mental health in young people and the skills to support others who may be having issues with their mental well-being;

"It's made me aware of the issues that a lot of people have. I didn't know there were so many issues and now that I know stuff I talk to my friends about it and they feel comfortable to talk to me about it. So it's not just helping people who come to the group. I can also help my friends if they ever want help and they know they're supported with me and they can talk to me openly about their mental health issues and I won't judge them in anyway."

Some of the volunteers reported how their confidence has improved since volunteering for Changing Minds and how the experiences have given them the confidence to speak in public and facilitate peer mentor sessions; *"I've gone from someone who never talked to someone who could speak in front of thousands of people"*. Others had put their voluntary work on their CV or their university application in order to boost their prospects; *"I talked about it in my university interview and they'd read it through and they actually asked me what it was about and they liked it."* One volunteer described how not only does voluntary work look good on you CV, but also gives you a sense of achievement and satisfaction with helping others;



"It not only looks good on your CV when applying to uni or jobs and stuff it makes you feel like a really good person. Like going out of your way to do something like this – it's a really nice thing. At

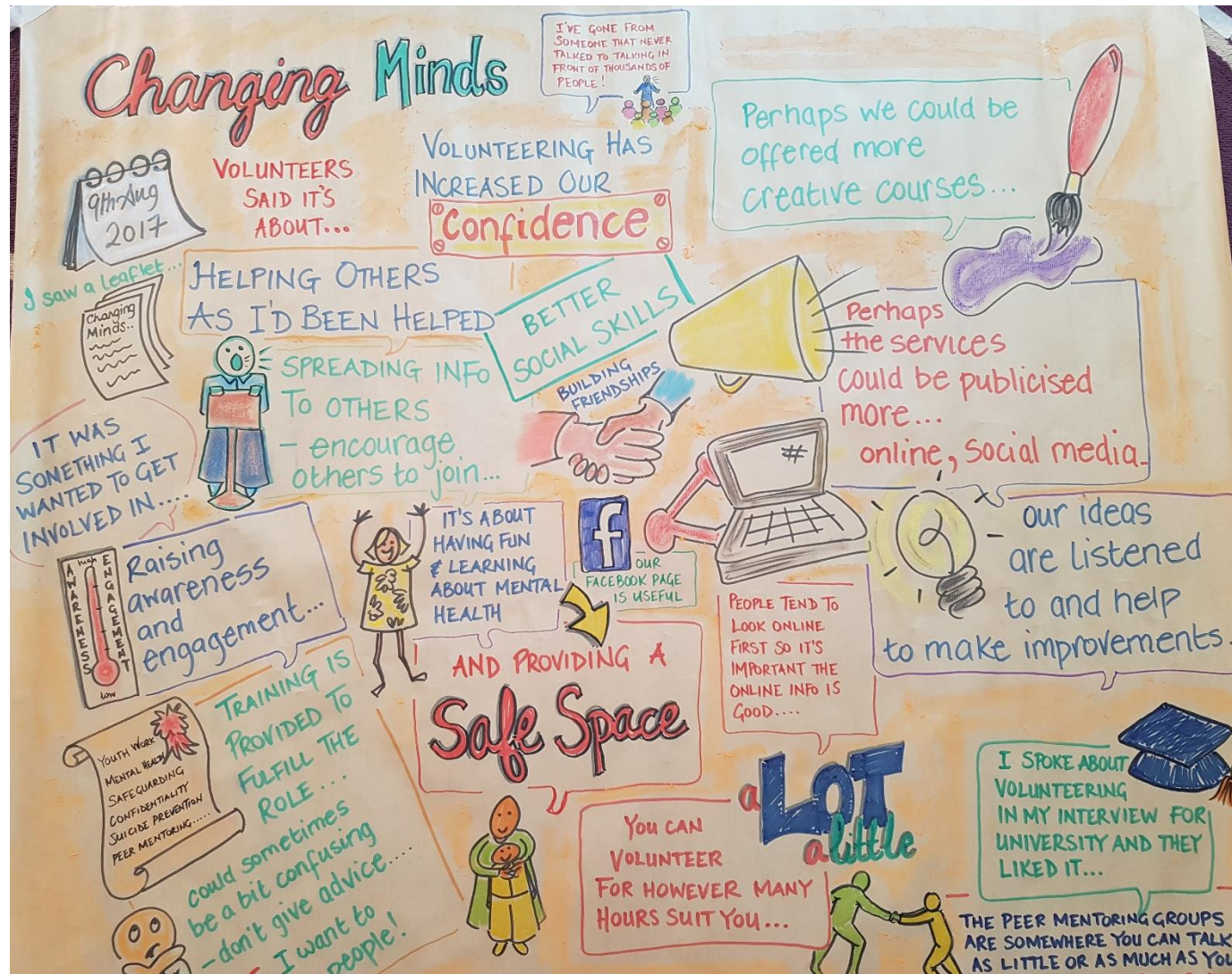
first you might want to do it to make it look good on your CV but then you really get into it – you put the time in and the effort in and its really beneficial. I wasn't expecting to stick at it but I really look forward to it every week."

SUMMARY

Key findings from this section of the project evaluation are as follows:

- Young people decided to volunteer for Changing Minds for a variety of reasons including to 'give back' to the service and because of an interest in voluntary work.
- Volunteers were given many responsibilities such as organising and facilitating peer mentor support groups and being pen pals for the Write with You project.
- The volunteers felt highly valued by the service as they were given the opportunity to share their ideas about how the service is run and shape the content and format of the support offered.
- Staff were easily accessible and supportive of volunteers.
- Volunteers described a range of benefits of the service for themselves personally, including building confidence, making new friends and a supportive peer network, and improving their CVs and applications to university.

VOLUNTEER DISCUSSION GROUP GRAPHIC by Marina McDonald



5. RESEARCH FINDINGS - STAKEHOLDERS

This chapter presents data from telephone interviews undertaken with 11 stakeholders who had referred young people into the service or who have a role in supporting young people in Gwent. Contact details of referrers into the service was provided to the WIHSC team by the project manager, who were then invited to take part in an interview. Eleven interviews were completed with stakeholders from a range of organisations, including Families First, Gwent Police, CAMHS, primary care mental health, social services, school nurses/counsellors, Torfaen youth services, and NHS sexual health services. One interviewee was recruited through WIHSC colleague, Professor Alka Ahuja, who is a Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist in Gwent. The stakeholder interviews focused on stakeholders experience with the Changing Minds service and the impact of the service on their organisation and the young people it supports.

NEED FOR THE SERVICE

Few other services to support young people with mental health issues

All of the stakeholders worked in services that supported young people in Gwent. Not all of the stakeholders provided support specifically for mental health issues, but often came into contact with young people who required help with their mental well-being. Stakeholders recognised the lack of current provision for young people in Gwent, especially for those with low level mental health issues, who did not meet the criteria for specialised child and adolescent mental health services;

“They are a valuable resource in terms that there is somewhere we can send families that can be more helpful at that primary level. I don’t know an awful lot about what they provide – how many they see and how often they see them. I’m just grateful that there is a service we can refer to and I think we need more services for children at a primary level.” [Community Team, Specialist CAMHS]

“We’ve got a lot of young people under the age of 25 who’ve got mental health problems and there is nowhere else as far as I’m aware in Newport that offer that support and that service.” [Women’s Diversion Scheme, Gwent Police]

“We provide sexual health service and often pick up young people with mental health issues. Its somewhere we can pass onto rather than bounce back to the GP. It’s an extra resource we can use and it’s very beneficial” [NHS Sexual Health Outreach]

“Waiting lists are a huge thing but it was the service that they offered that was the main thing because there wasn’t much available for emotional wellbeing for teenagers, so that resource was very appealing. I think most of the school nurses would feel the same.” [School Nurse]

It was also acknowledged that services providing mental and emotional well-being support in young people are very much in demand; *“Emotional wellbeing is the main reason for referrals for the comprehensive age child.” [School Nurse]*. The fact that there are always waiting lists for these services reflects a high level of need in the community; *“Services quickly become saturated which indicates there’s huge need out there.” [Community Team, Specialist CAMHS]*

Capacity in other mental health services

Linked to this issue was the problem of other services for young people being at full capacity. Stakeholders from CAMHS, for example, reflected on the criteria for their specialised Tier 2 or 3 services

and the number of inappropriate referrals that they receive. They commented on the lack of current primary services for young people experiencing mental health issues and a lack of knowledge amongst referrers of the most appropriate service for young people; *“Our criteria is moderate to severe mental health difficulties. We’re a small team with a small service and a really high demand we do try our best to only accept people with moderate to severe mental health difficulties. It’s not always that straightforward. Lots of people that come to us have all sorts of complex difficulties not necessarily meaning a mental health illness. We often we look for other services at the primary level to meet the needs of the young people who don’t fully meet our criteria.”* [Community Team, Specialist CAMHS]

One of the benefits of Changing Minds was that stakeholders had a service to which they could refer young people with mild to moderate mental health issues for which a CAMHS or Primary Care Mental Health Team referral would not be appropriate;

“The waiting list for CAMHS groups is rather ridiculous in my experience. I’ve got one young person who’s waiting to access anxiety management and they’re looking at a November cohort which is too long to wait if they’ve got anxiety. I haven’t witnessed those groups and its more acute than what they do at Changing Minds, which is more low level, but I know the waiting lists are huge.” [Families First]

“Primary mental health have got 200 odd on their waiting list. CAMHS is really really difficult because they’re a tier 2 specialist service so CAMHS is quite difficult to get a referral accepted and rightly so if they’re trying to tighten their services up there. It’s quite limited really.” [School Nurse]

“There is a high demand on our services and that’s due to a lack of primary services that deal with children and young people’s mental health. A lot of people just refer straight through to specialist CAMHS thinking that we see everybody. We’re really grateful that there are things like Changing Minds out there because we believe that’s where the children and young people’s needs should be met, at least in the first instance.” [Community Team, Specialist CAMHS]

It was also commented that Changing Minds provides an option for young people who are transitioning between child and adult NHS mental health services. Changing Minds can ensure that people are not discharged without any appropriate support; *“sometimes we refer to the primary services if the young person is coming up to 18 or if we need to discharge them from our service as they’re coming up to 18 but they don’t fit with the adult mental health service – their difficulties not severe enough but they want some ongoing support we’ll often refer ... so they have someone to talk to once they’ve been discharged so they’re not being discharged to nothing but there are support services they can engage with”* [Community Team, Specialist CAMHS]

USE OF THE SERVICE

Referral process and communication

Several stakeholder commented on the simple and efficient referral process to Changing Minds. The online form was seen as particularly easy to use;

“The referral forms really simple and the fact that you can do it online is really useful. I’ve had contact from them – a text or an email to say if there’s something missing or they need something else or they need a number or whatever. I’ve had that and been able to get back to them straight away.” [Specialist Practitioner Primary Care Mental Health]

“The fact that it’s an online form and you just click send, it’s so much easier than some of the other forms... It’s nice to be just able to go online and fill in everything click send and that’s done then.” [Families First]

“I think I’ve done it online in the past. I think I’ve had some phone communication as well so the last one I put through was an online referral. I quite like that because you might be doing it after hours and it’s an easy way of getting it done. And also it allows us to have a paper trail of who you’ve referred onto.” [Social Worker]

There was also perceived to be good two-way communication between stakeholder organisations and the Changing Minds team. Stakeholders commented that Changing Minds were quick to respond to queries and also quick to contact the young people who had been referred; *“The communication has been quite easy really. I would say it’s one of the better ones”* [Specialist Practitioner Primary Care Mental Health].

Regarding communication between organisations – there were mixed views on the need for feedback about referrals from Changing Minds. For example, some stakeholders stated that they have very time-limited contact with young people and feedback about an individual who they had discharged would not be necessary; *“We wouldn’t have the headspace for information about cases that we’ve closed.”* [Social Worker]. Whereas a smaller number of stakeholders said they would like feedback about, for example, whether a young person that they referred had engaged with Changing Minds or not. Most stakeholders however were of the opinion that feedback about individual referrals was not useful for them, but that they would like to be informed of service developments or changes; *“We wouldn’t necessarily expect or need feedback about their attendance or their progress but I think maybe closer contact between us as services – secondary and primary services – would be helpful. Or if anything changes in terms of what Changing Minds provided or anything new, or if they’ve got significant waiting times because we refer without any of that information.”* [Community Team, Specialist CAMHS]

Changing Minds was also considered to have a good reputation amongst the other organisations. Many said that they had previous experience of liaising with Newport Mind and had also had sufficient information about the Changing Minds service so that they were comfortable in referring young people with concerns about their mental well-being; *“They are pretty good, we rely on them. Lots of agencies ask us to refer into them but I don’t know enough about them so we won’t refer as we don’t know who they are or what they do...with Changing Minds you feel you can trust them and value them. They are reputable. They come to meetings etc and we have a good understanding of what they provide.”* [NHS Sexual Health Outreach]

One of the stakeholders reported that they were working in partnership with Changing Minds to develop training for their staff; *“They’re working with us to develop bespoke training programs for front facing workers. Its trying to enable youth workers to prevent medicalising young people before they need to be. So when a young person mentions mental health you don’t immediately panic and put a CAMHS referral in and you’re able to deal with them and do some positive engagement with them.”* [Youth Services]

Variety of support options for young people

Several stakeholders commented on the range of supportive interventions that Changing Minds provides. This was seen as very beneficial as the stakeholders sometimes worked in services where they offered a single, focused intervention. Most of the stakeholders understood that the young people referred to Changing Minds had a choice of services to pick from and could access as many as they wanted;

“They do a range of things – they do one-to-one, they do longer support than I can offer...so it’s nice that they do a range of interventions.” [Specialist Practitioner Primary Care Mental Health]

“They offer much more than self-help groups” [Women’s Diversion Scheme, Gwent Police]

It was also reported that Changing Minds offers something unique for young people in Gwent. The peer led support groups were seen as being a valuable resource as the service users can develop to become volunteers and facilitate the peer support groups themselves. This offers a longer term support structure; *“I know some of the courses that Changing Minds do are led by support workers but it’s the option of once you’ve gone through that to attend peers support then you yourself can become a peer support. I think it’s unique in that way in that the young people have a massive say over what goes on with the project, which I haven’t seen anywhere else in Newport.” [Families First]*

The pen pal project was also seen as being a unique resource for young people whose anxiety may be a barrier to them accessing more traditional face-to-face support; *“They do the pen pals service as well, which is really good for some of our young people who don’t feel confident enough to talk about their feelings or their issues in person with other young people but they want to meet other young people who get it... There’s nothing else like it in Newport at all. The idea of writing – because a lot of our young people use writing or drawing or doodling or whatever as a positive coping strategy and so instead of self-harming or risk taking behaviour they can write a letter to their pen pal and send it off.” [Families First].*

IMPACT OF THE SERVICE

Early intervention

Stakeholders recognised the importance of early intervention for young people who were experiencing emotional and mental well-being difficulties. Changing Minds was seen as an important early intervention service, that if delivered at an appropriate time in the young persons’ experience, could prevent their mental health issues from escalating to a point where they would need more higher tier support;

“I would like to think that people would get the help a bit earlier. It would help them develop more resilience so they wouldn’t need to come in to more specialist services and would be able to find support more easily and more quickly at the right age.” [Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychologist]

“They very much pick up the shades of grey where it’s not quite a mental health illness or diagnosed issue and I think they prevent a lot of young people from snowballing down that road.” [Families First]

“Early intervention and addressing needs help to prevent the more significant emotion and wellbeing issues. It may be that’s all that’s needed and if not they would have to be referred to more specialist services but if early intervention is enough then it would prevent that escalation.” [School Nurse]

One stakeholder from Families First gave an example of where Changing Minds provided appropriate early intervention for a young person who wasn’t at the stage of needing a CAMHS referral. In this way, Changing Minds may be relieving pressure on other more specialised services;

“I had a young person who was starting to control her eating, but it didn’t meet CAMHS threshold in that she wasn’t underweight, it wasn’t acute enough for CAMHS support. So you’ve got to

develop an illness to get CAMHS support at the moment whereas Changing Minds were able to pick her up and talk through those issues and prevent it from becoming an issue where we've got a severely underweight young person who needs support from CAMHS." [Families First]

Another example provided by a stakeholder from Youth Services, demonstrated the positive impact of Changing Minds on the emotional well-being of one young person;

"One young person in particular, she's been with us for three years, she started Changing Minds and did their peer-led programme, became a peer tutor and the change in her ..The change has been vast...her confidence, her self-esteem, her self-image has just absolutely skyrocketed. It's just wonderful to see in terms of her quality of life she's getting. Changing Minds would have been a significant part of that." [Youth Services]

Support after discharge from other services

Changing Minds was also used by stakeholders as a place to refer young people after they had received an intervention in their service. Some of these interventions were brief and focused, after which the young person would be discharged. To then re-access the NHS services, they would have to go back to their GP to be referred onto the waiting list again. Changing Minds provided a service that stakeholders could refer their clients into after their own service had ended, thereby providing the young person with ongoing support should they need it.

"...if they felt that there was more help that was needed they were aware that there were these services and these courses, as opposed to going to their GP and getting referred onto a long waiting list" [Recovery Worker, Primary Care Mental Health]

"The work we have to do is quite brief, it's very focused. And then to reach the end of 6 or 7 sessions and to be in a position to say what's gone well, what can we continue doing, and then if you feel that you need more support or you are relapsing then there is this group that you can access. Instead of coming back and going through the rigmarole of referral and assessment. In quite a cyclical discharge and re-referral." [Recovery Worker, Primary Care Mental Health]

Accessible and engaging

A stakeholder from specialist CAMHS described referring a young person to Changing Minds as she might engage better with the service than she had with CAMHS. Changing Minds having local provision across Gwent was a factor in the accessibility of the service. Also the fact that if someone does not attend a CAMHS appointment, they may have a long wait for another appointment. Changing Minds was seen as more flexible and engaging; *"...she had some travel difficulties so she wasn't able to travel to any of our bases and also she had a history of not attending. I said for her it would be a better fit for her to engage with something more local, somewhere where she has a little bit more control over her appointments, where they are and when they happen. With our service if they get offered an appointment and they don't come it could be a while before they get another one. I just thought it would fit with her and allow her to be a bit more autonomous." [Community Team, Specialist CAMHS]*

Another stakeholder provided an example of a young person who engaged well with the group support within the Changing Minds service after a difficult experience with CAMHS and other services; *"There's one specific young person, she was under CAMHS, had significant mental health difficulties, was medicated and I went to a multiagency meeting with CAMHS and they said one-to-one support doesn't work for this young person. She just wouldn't engage in terms of one-to-one support. But referring her to Changing Minds and she's got group support, it's like she's a completely different person. She engages*

well. You can tell someone until you're blue in the face that self-harming is a negative coping strategy but hearing that from another young person rather than a worker who's paid to tell you that. I think that works better in cases like her in particular." [Families First]

Similarly, peer groups were viewed by other stakeholders as having a beneficial impact. Being able to talk to people their own age who may be experiencing similar issues was seen as being of therapeutic value to the young people;

"Recognising their own issues and realise that actually a lot of people have those issues and develop some strategies for coping with them and they might need to talk to people and get a bit more help" [Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychologist]

"14 to 25 is less threatening for that age group. It's more attractive. They're not looking at 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 year olds – that's more attractive to 14, 15 years olds. They going to be treated like grown-ups with a mind of their own." [Specialist Practitioner Primary Care Mental Health]

"I think there's different needs for young people. I would imagine if there's a service that's geared up for me and my peers if I was 16 I may have a better response to that and get more out of the service then. It feels more accessible to me." [Social Worker]

"I did have a child who was very anxious to the extreme and because it was a 1-2-1 service she did engage with that really well and then she engaged with me ...that was huge." [Families First]

However, some of the stakeholders did comment that it would be useful to lower the age at which young people can access the Changing Minds service;

"I would like to see it 13, because I've had two 13 years olds who I thought they're just out of range and they're still a teenager. If it could be 13 that would be great." [Specialist Practitioner Primary Care Mental Health]

"In Families First we work with any age range and the amount of 12, 13 year olds we get would really benefit from something like Changing Minds that aren't eligible." [Families First]

"The only gap we haven't got is it doesn't start until 14. We're often working with children who are 11, 12, 13 who could do with it, especially the anger management. There's quite a bit there and there's a gap we could do with Changing Minds coming down to a lower age. But I understand they must be busy." [Families First]

The social worker we interviewed also commented that Changing Minds, and other similar services, maybe more appealing to young people as it doesn't carry the stigma that's attached to social services;

"I think they do a really good job and its more open services rather than like social services where we carry a big label and we've got that stigma. People see those services as more supportive rather than social services where 'you've got to do this because, you've got to do that because'. Its voluntary and I think that's helpful for people." [Social Worker]

Providing appropriate non-clinical support

Some stakeholders reflected on the nature of the Changing Minds service compared to other more clinic-based mental health services. Again it was reported that young people often do not need, or would benefit from, an appointment at a specialised Tier 2 or 3 mental health service; *"A majority of people that we see don't need a specialist CAMHS service...surely primary services should be better placed to meet their needs. At that age it's not usually a diagnosable mental illness, a significant depression, or anxiety, psychosis – of course there are some – but for a majority they need something at that primary*

level to work out what's going on for them and their family and support there rather than come into a specialist mental health service." [Community Team, Specialist CAMHS]

The stakeholders recognised the importance of providing young people with an opportunity to connect with their peers and share their experiences and feelings with each other. The relaxed, less formal and non-clinical environment provided by Changing Minds was praised as being engaging for young people. Also the Changing Minds staff are able to spend time talking to the young person and getting to know them before dealing with their mental health issues;

"I think it's actually really, really helpful. At the moment young people are under a huge amount of additional pressures and I think having a safe place to talk and just talk about their worries and just talk about if they feel anxious or very stressed. A safe place to talk for young men and young women." [Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychologist]

"I think that's a lot calmer than a CAMHS group or a CAMHS appointment – the feedback I've had from young people is that CAMHS is very clinical and it feels really uncomfortable whereas Changing Minds, you can have a bit of fun with it. And with CAMHS you go in, you see a doctor, and they've got half an hour or whatever and they get stuck in to the issues straight away because that's what they're there for, they need to know. Whereas with Changing Minds, the workers can build a rapport with that person before having to dig out the nitty gritty and that really helps the young people to be able to truly say what's wrong." [Families First]

Finally, we asked stakeholders what the impact would be on them and the young people they support if Changing Minds were not to continue. A selection of responses is provided below;

"I would be overrun with referrals and I would have to turn away a lot of young people who need support but they don't meet our criteria because there's no family work there. I think it would get to the point where CAMHS would be inundated with young people needing support, they wouldn't be able to deal with it, meaning their threshold would get even higher and there would be tones of young people who would be left in limbo, who aren't quite sick enough to get CAMHS support but aren't right at the same time." [Families First]

"I'd be devastated. I wouldn't be happy at all. I'd be quite upset. Because I'm so limited and have such a large area to cover, I'm so reliant on those support services to refer onto." [Specialist Practitioner Primary Care Mental Health]

"If Changing Minds wasn't there it wouldn't have an effect on our service because we wouldn't be able to accept referrals so it would just be passed back and it would be the children and families that would suffer. We have to keep our strict criteria, we can't open our doors to people who would access primary services if there's no primary services there it just creates a gap. In the long term is that these children and young people, their difficulties would increase and they would end up meeting the criteria for specialist CAMHS, which would be concerning because they haven't had the appropriate support at the right time. Self-harm would increase, distress, low mood – all of those issues might not be managed timely enough so they would become more unwell and in the longer term it would have an impact on our service. I don't know what evidence there is that these children would become more unwell – some would and some won't whether they get services or not." [Community Team, Specialist CAMHS]

"We'd have nowhere to send these young people and it would have a bigger impact on us because if we're not able to meet the needs of these women and that's what this project's based on ... if

these women's needs aren't being met of course they're going to come back into the criminal justice system." [Women's Diversion Scheme, Gwent Police]

"If Changing Minds wasn't around anymore it would be a waiting game – the young people would have to get sicker and sicker until they would be able to get support." [Families First]

"It would be removing a tier of support that no one else really provides. It's that step between identifying young people who are at risk of mental health emotional well-being concerns and issues who aren't at a stage where they are in need of medical support. Changing Minds provides that level of support. It also provides young people with the mechanisms to help other young people, which is really valuable." [Youth Worker]

"If they weren't to continue it would be massive we would have a huge gap now with that little bit. But for us to make referrals to have counselling support, the 1-2-1, with the groups, one of my children even went to on to help with the counselling themselves – they were counselling peers. You'd have none of that, we haven't got time to do that." [Families First]

"We know that emotion and wellbeing is increasing amongst all ages so if the service ended again it would be sat on someone's waiting list and perhaps things would escalate." [School Nurse]

SUMMARY

- Changing Minds was perceived to be a valuable resource for stakeholders working in services which support young people – either as a service to refer individuals who present with mental health issues or as a 'back-up' service to direct inappropriate referrals or after discharge from a service
- Changing Minds was seen as providing a unique variety of support options for young people in Gwent
- Stakeholders praised the ease of referral processes and the communication received from Changing Minds
- It was seen as being an accessible and engaging service for young people with low level mental health issues for whom higher tier mental health services were not appropriate and for which demand is high
- Changing Minds provides an opportunity for young people to connect with peers in a relaxed and non-clinical environment
- This form of early intervention support was viewed as being crucial for preventing escalating mental health problems in young people and therefore easing pressure on existing NHS mental health services.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this final chapter, all of the preceding evidence is considered, and conclusions are drawn regarding how successful the project has been in achieving its aims.

Table 6.1 maps the evidence gathered against the three project aims, and makes an assessment as to whether each has been achieved.

Table 6.1 • Assessment of whether outcomes have been achieved

Stated project outcome	Achievement of outcome
<i>More young people will have access to more support with their mental health earlier and improved social networks through the peer support. They will be able to develop stronger relationships as a result of the skills learnt and the relationships made during the self-management courses.</i>	<p>OUTCOME ACHIEVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stakeholder interviews demonstrate that Changing Minds provides an accessible and valuable early intervention service and may help prevent mental health issues in young people from escalating, potentially reducing pressures on existing services - Beneficiary/volunteer interviews and the online survey demonstrate that young people make friends through Changing Minds and reduces social isolation - Analysis of the Changing Minds internal wellness wheel data and the online survey show positive improvements in young people's wellbeing
<i>Young people with mental health problems will be able, through the project, to access three different and joined up methods of support, tailored to their individual needs, that through partnership working and stakeholder involvement, will act as a focus and a catalyst for influencing and improving the support young people get with their mental health from other organisations or services..</i>	<p>OUTCOME ACHIEVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many of the young people access more than one of the methods of support offered by Changing Minds - Beneficiaries reported they had a choice of support options which was tailored to their needs. The service was described as engaging and flexible. - The volunteer interviews demonstrate that by being supported by Changing Minds they developed the confidence and skills to support their peers and act as champions for the service - Stakeholder interviews suggest that Changing Minds is valued by other organisations and is seen as a reputable and reliable service
<i>More young people with mental health problems will have the support, learn the skills and develop the confidence to successfully manage transitions and lead full and active lives through accessing or providing peer support, attending the self-</i>	<p>OUTCOME ACHIEVED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Beneficiaries reported that Changing Minds staff were supportive and caring, which had a positive impact on their lives

management courses or being supported by a transitions worker.

- They described highly positive experiences with Changing Minds. They received information about mental health issues and coping strategies as well as opportunities to connect with peers in a relaxed and non-clinical environment.
-

The data gathered from beneficiaries, volunteers and stakeholders all reflected upon the high level of need for emotional and mental well-being support services for young people in Gwent. The fact that there is such a demand for services was demonstrated in the 2014 CAMHS inquiry³ which reported that the total number of CAMHS referrals to treatment in Wales doubled between April 2010 and July 2014. The number of referrals waiting for more than 18 weeks saw an almost five-fold increase during that period. The inquiry also reported that many referrals to CAMHS do not meet the criteria to enter the service, which results in young people either

- a) having to wait until their condition worsens to access support;
- b) desperately seeking a medical diagnosis in order to gain access to CAMHS; or
- c) having their referrals not accepted and not being able to access support.

This evaluation of the Changing Minds service points to the key role of the service in preventing these negative consequences of unmet need. Changing Minds provides an accessible and engaging service for young people who may be referred before their condition worsens to such an extent that they meet the criteria for higher tier mental health services. Beneficiaries benefitted from the relatively short waiting times for Changing Minds services – although the wait for some services was not short enough for some of the young people we spoke to – which contrasted to their wait for support from other organisations. Stakeholders also highlighted the efficient referral processes for Changing Minds and the lack of other early intervention/prevention services in Gwent. Changing Minds has no entry criteria and is open to all 14-25 year olds living in Gwent. This was seen as a beneficial aspect of the service. Stakeholders reported feeling comfortable that they could refer young people who were inappropriate for CAMHS or other mental health services to Changing Minds so that they would get access to timely and appropriate support. Several of the people we consulted with during the evaluation said that there is a need for services such as Changing Minds for even younger people, at ages 11+ years.

Both beneficiaries and stakeholders appreciated the choice of supportive interventions that young people could access through Changing Minds. The options of one-to-one support, self-management courses and peer support groups meant that there was ‘something for everyone’. The service is also perceived to be fairly unique in Gwent with the option of, for example, a pen pal project and peer-to-peer support not being available elsewhere. The idea that young people can develop the confidence and skills to go on to volunteer for Changing Minds and help other young people was also highly valued by stakeholders and the volunteers themselves. They had created supportive environments with their peers and had also a strong online community on Facebook.

The impact of the service was demonstrated by the increases in well-being seen in the wellness wheel data analysis and the online survey which was completed by 81 young people. A majority of young people reported that they feel listened to at Changing Minds and that they have learnt new skills that they use in their daily life. Changing Minds provided a safe space where young people could talk openly

³ <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld10016%20-%20report%20by%20the%20children,%20young%20people%20and%20education%20committee%20-%20inquiry%20into%20child%20and%20adolescent%20mental%20health/cr-ld10016-e.pdf>

and share their experiences with other young people. It was often reassuring to know that other young people were going through similar experiences.

In relation to current Welsh policy, the Changing Minds service appears to fit in well with 'Together for Children and Young People' Framework for Action⁴ which is aiming to improve the emotional and mental health of children and young people in Wales, in line with the principles of prudent health and care. Specifically, Changing Minds sits well within the Resilience and Early Intervention work stream of the framework. The self-management courses, one-to-one support and peer support groups can be seen as early interventions and effective methods of improving emotional resilience in young people by providing them with the skills to manage their emotions effectively. The framework also states that *'Children and young people are being given the opportunity to develop and shape the future delivery of emotional and mental health services through broad roots engagement that captures the well-being of all children and not just those who use Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).'* Changing Minds Young Persons Advisory Panel (YPAP) and the input of volunteers into the organisation and facilitation of the support services offered, demonstrate an excellent example of how young people can contribute to and shape the services that are provided for them.

⁴ <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/documents/Framework%20For%20Action.pdf>

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